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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 003860

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [KDEM](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: BABIL: WILL MODERATE SADRISTS EMERGE IN ELECTIONS?

Classified By: PRT Babil Team Leader Ken Hillas for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

(U) This is a Babil PRT reporting cable.

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Senior Sadrists in Babil Province believe that a more moderate Sadrists presence may emerge if Muqtada al-Sadr's followers comply with his recent directive to participate in the upcoming provincial elections. Da'wa provincial leaders are hopeful about the prospects for cooperation with Sadrists in the new Provincial Council (PC). Our Babil interlocutors are divided, however, over how much change the elections will bring. Some expect that ISCI's political dominance will be reduced; others believe the party's deep pockets and its influence with the army and police will help them retain power. Sadrists still have no clear signal from Muqtada about whom to support, thus the battle between moderate and hard-line Sadrists in Babil continues. End summary.

Da'wa, Sadrists Focus on Beating ISCI  
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¶2. (C) In a joint December 5 meeting with the PRT, Da'wa deputy party chief Dr. Ne'ama and moderate Sadrists Murtada Kamil, both PC members, said that their parties are focused on beating the province's dominant party, ISCI. Da'wa and the Sadrists are running separately in the elections, but expressed hoped that the parties could work together in the new PC. Dr. Ne'ama said that the Sadrists call to participate in provincial elections will increase the chances of non-ISCI candidates, since most voters identify ISCI with the failure of religious parties to deliver services for their constituents. They also believe that ISCI will not be able to convince the public that it is the preferred choice of the Najaf religious leadership. Kamil acknowledged that some Sadrists candidates are masquerading as independents. Neither man is running for re-election.

¶3. (C) Both Da'wa and Sadrists fear election fraud perpetrated by ISCI. Dr. Ne'ama and Murtada believe that ISCI will attempt to rig the results in the early voting period for the police, the army and prisoners. They believe that the party has infiltrated the provincial leadership of the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and are concerned that commanders will pressure those under them to vote for ISCI. Ne'ama and Murtada urged that the PRT underscore to General Fadhil Radad, the IP commander, the need to avoid any partisanship by ISF. They also suggested that an ISCI-leaning electoral office will be able to twist the confusing proliferation of candidates (more than 1400 for 30 PC seats) to ISCI's advantage. To guard against perceived election fraud, Da'wa will have 1600 observers at polling places throughout the province.

Former OMS Director More Skeptical  
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¶4. (C) In contrast to Ne'ama and Murtada, Dr. Salah, the former OMS Political Director in Hillah, does not foresee a big shift in political power in the PC. Salah, who was also

in the December 5 meeting, does not see much of an opening in the short term for change in OMS attitudes toward the political process. (Note: Dr. Salah recently resigned his OMS position, citing JAM extremist threats against his life.)

He mentioned two major factors that affect the Sadrists' relationship to the political process. First, entering the political process means to some extent dealing with Coalition Forces (CF) and ISF, which is difficult for hardened Sadrists to justify to their peers and supporters. He suggested this problem could be resolved if they held government positions and could meet as part of their official duties. Second, it is difficult for Sadrists to cooperate or form coalitions with other parties because party extremists view such cooperation as disloyalty.

15. (C) Dr. Salah suggested that OMS moderates are gradually gaining the upper hand, although he painted a picture of confusion and contradiction within the movement's leadership.

He believes there are Sadrists' initiatives to open dialogue with others. Since being released from prison in April, he has noticed that changes in OMS personnel indicate that progress is being made. He pointed to the internal conflict between OMS Babil leader Sheikh Sadiq al-Issawi, a moderate, and Sayyid Sa'ad, one of the OMS/JAM extremists in Hillah. This conflict was resolved by the OMS leadership in Najaf by transferring Sa'ad to Maysan Province. Dr. Salah predicted that Muqtada's call for his followers to participate in the political process would help boost voter turnout among his followers and bolster Sadrists' prospects of winning seats on the new PC.

Which Sadrists to Support?

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16. (C) Sadrists' voters still do not have a clear signal from Muqtada al-Sadr about which Sadrists' candidates to support. This predicament was apparent at last Friday's mosque sermon by Sheikh Sadiq, who is a credible voice for Muqtada. Sheikh Sadiq reiterated the call to participate, but, when asked by followers whom to vote for, could only say he was waiting for directions. In the meeting with the PRT, Dr. Salah and Muqtada indicated that OMS does have favored candidates in the province, but these have not been made public.

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